

With U.S. Mood Changing, Carter Faces Senate Fight to Approve Pact

Odds Seen Against Passage

By HEDRICK SMITH

Probably not since the Senate rejected Woodrow Wilson's bid to join the League of Nations in 1919 has a President confronted so precarious a struggle in Congress on foreign policy as Jimmy Carter faces over the strategic-arms agreement with the Soviet Union.

The political climate has changed dramatically since September 1972, the high-water mark of Soviet-American détente, when the first strategic-arms accord was adopted in the Senate by a vote of 88 to 2.

Majority Not in Sight

Now there is disillusionment with détente and rising concern both in the country and in Congress over the rapid buildup of the Soviet nuclear arsenal since 1972. There is worry in some quarters that the United States has let its military position weaken to one of strategic inferiority and, moreover, a nagging anxiety that Washington may no longer be able to check effectively on any Soviet cheating under the new treaty.

In this climate of uncertainty, Administration strategists accept the assessment of such advocates of arms control as Senator George McGovern, Democrat of South Dakota, that the necessary two-thirds majority for Senate approval is not in sight at present.

"The odds are against the treaty," said Senator Howard H. Baker Jr., the minority leader, who has provided crucial support to President Carter on several important foreign-policy votes but who now leans against this treaty. "It's not a long shot," added Mr. Baker, a Tennessee Republican, "but the odds are slightly against it," especially if Mr. Carter rejects Senate efforts to amend it.

The President takes the position that no substantive amendments are acceptable, according to his aides, and that the Senate must vote the treaty up or down as presented. The White House strategy is to try to beat back the opposition's amendments and win support by making limited concessions that do not alter the language. The Administration hopes to lure skeptical moderates and conservatives to its side by offering promises of expanded military programs.

Some, Senator Baker among them, bristle at the President's take-it-or-leave-it approach and insist that it cannot succeed. "I think that's an extremely unlikely prospect," he commented.

A vote will probably not come until October at the earliest and more likely not until next January or February, so precise counts of Senate support are not too meaningful. A White House official, trying to convey the rough balance of forces, said in private recently that even though most senators are publicly uncommitted, 45 are loosely counted as likely supporters and 35 as either hard-line opponents or highly dubious, enough to kill the treaty if they remain solidly against the President; there are believed to be 20 swing votes. Some experts count the hard-line opposition at 25.

Every Vote Seen as Vital

In either case, the Administration must pick up virtually every undecided vote and win several who lean against the treaty if passage is to be won.

Approval will be difficult, a key White House strategist conceded, but he added: "I'm optimistic and enthusiastically so. Others will be, too, once we make our case. I think it's going to look at the outset like a flawed treaty. But as time goes on it's going to look like a better and better treaty. And in the end we'll get down to the politics of the issue and then I think we'll be O.K."

While Administration officials concede that they face an uphill fight, they feel that they have been handicapped by inability to make the best case until completion of the treaty and its disclosure to the public.

On April 25 the President marshaled his best arguments to initiate his personal campaign. Imperfect as the accord may be, he argued, it provides necessary predictability for defense planning and maintains the momentum of arms control for future action. The alternative, he warned, is "the dark nightmare of unrestrained arms competition."

Central View Is Challenged

Republican opponents in the Senate such as Jake Garn of Utah, John G. Tower of Texas and Jesse A. Helms of North Carolina challenge the President's central assertion that the treaty enhances American security and puts limits on the Russians. On the Democratic side, Senator Henry M. Jackson of Washington, the leading critic of the 1972 treaty though he finally voted for it, said: "I think the treaty's in deep trouble unless there are some modifications. I think there will have to be some amendments, some improvements."

He and others who take his position want the United States to have the right to match the Soviet advantage of 308 heavy ICBM's. They want to see restrictions on the Soviet bomber known in the West as Backfire written into the treaty instead of handled in a side letter. They want to see range limitations lifted on ground- and sea-launched cruise missiles and the United States allowed to share missile technology with its European allies. They want Washington to have a clear right to base the projected MX mobile missile in multiple silos so that it can

be shifted around in a nuclear shell game to prevent the Russians from wiping out American ICBM's in a single strike.

On the other side, such Democratic liberals as Senator McGovern and Senator William Proxmire of Wisconsin, and Senator Mark O. Hatfield of Oregon, a Republican liberal, threaten to oppose the treaty because it does too little to restrict nuclear weapons.

The Key Men in the Middle

The fate of the treaty is more likely to rest with a handful of key senators in the middle, such moderate conservatives as Mr. Baker and Henry Bellmon of Oklahoma on the Republican side, and among the Democrats, Sam Nunn of Georgia, John Glenn of Ohio, John C. Stennis of Mississippi and Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia, the majority leader. In the end, most observers expect, Senators Byrd and Stennis will go along with the Administration, possibly timing their decisions to influence other wavers; the others are less certain.

For Senator Glenn, as for many of his colleagues, the key issue is verification, whether the United States can effectively check on Soviet cheating, especially in view of the loss of two electronic listening posts in Iran in February. The opposition pounced on the statement by Adm. Stansfield Turner, Director of Central Intelligence, that it would take until 1984 to fully replace the capabilities of those stations.

For Senator Nunn, who has become one of the most influential voices in Congress on military policy and whose final stand is expected to influence a number of undecided Southern colleagues, the essential issue is the overall American military posture. In a speech on April 30 he deplored current trends, saying: "We have not competed effectively with the Soviet Union in the military arena. Unless we and our allies are prepared to do so, we can expect future arms-control agreements with Moscow to do little more than ratify an emerging Soviet military superiority." As a remedy he urged the Administration to step up American military programs in the years ahead.

Possible Area of Compromise

"If there's a payoff for the conservatives and undecideds like Nunn," an Administration strategist acknowledged, "it's in this area: the MX missile, Trident II, the cruise missiles. In the end we're going to have to hope that the liberals will go along and recognize that to defeat this treaty is to end the SALT process." The Trident is a nuclear-powered submarine designed to carry nuclear-armed missiles.

CONTINUED

press not only for full review of American policy but also global competition with Moscow. "The atmosphere is more suspicious — no, more apprehensive is better — toward SALT than six months ago," he said. "I think the Russians are out to be No. 1."

If the Administration can convince the Glenn group on verification and satisfy the Nunn-Baker group with new defense programs or accept a Senate resolution condemning certain Soviet actions, it will still face pressures for amendments from outright opponents or critics. But this, too, could afford an out for those senators who want to "split their vote," as one analyst of Congressional affairs put it: that is, vote "hard" on a preliminary issue and then in favor of the treaty.

This strategy worked for the first treaty. Senator Jackson and the forces who are disturbed that the Russians were permitted more missile launchers than the United States were able to push through a resolution instructing the negotiators to insure equality on launchers in the second treaty.

Moreover, liberals including Senator Gary Hart, Democrat of Colorado, want to push through amendments, probably acceptable to the Administration, that would forbid any extension of the duration of a protocol that accompanies the treaty and, if extended, would restrict important American programs.

Senator Garn, who has emerged as the leader of the hard-core opposition, said, "I expect the Administration to come up with a minor amendment or two that they have pre-greased with the Soviet Union and use that to get around any substantive amendment on the treaty."